


The Washington Post *Democracy Dies in Darkness*

THE HEALTH 202

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policy debate in Washington.

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The curious case of Puerto Rico's Medicaid funding

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Happy Tuesday, where today is apparently...National Ask a Stupid Question Day. (Our motto, since we ask questions for a living, is that every question is good.)

Today, we dive into how a government shutdown would affect the federal health department and Pelosi's reconciliation reversal. But first:

The administration finds a route to permanently give Puerto Rico more Medicaid money

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- In 2019, **President Trump** intervened to cut funding for Puerto Rico's program included in a larger spending deal, Rachana Pradhan reported for **Politico** at the time.

Yet, it's unclear if the new dollars are here to stay. Tucked inside the stopgap spending bill is a request for the government watchdog agency to review the Biden administration's calculations by Nov. 15.

Puerto Rico Gov. Pedro Pierluisi:

The background

Medicaid funding for the territories is structured differently than it is for the states. And it's complex.

Here's the quick digest:

- **In the states:** There's no limit on the cash the federal government can put toward states' Medicaid programs.
- **But in the territories:** There's a cap on the amount of money the territories' Medicaid programs can receive from the federal government per year.
- **In Congress:** While the funding limits are relatively low, lawmakers almost always increase them for a few years. They also typically boost the low rate at which the federal government matches the territories' Medicaid dollars.

What happened

If Congress didn't act: The federal government would have only been allowed to spend \$392 million on Puerto Rico's Medicaid program, down from roughly \$3 billion this year.

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There's more

The jockeying isn't over yet.

Congress still needs to increase the low rate the government matches the territories' Medicaid dollars — which it plans to do in the stopgap spending bill. And Democrats, Republicans and Puerto Rico officials have their own agendas extending beyond the temporary fix.

- **More funding, please.** Puerto Rico officials say the \$2.9 billion cap isn't enough money. Galva said the program doesn't have the cash to pay for services mandatory in other states, like non-emergency transportation and diabetes supplies.
- **Welcome news. Rep. Frank Pallone** (D-N.J.) — who chairs the powerful panel overseeing Medicaid — plans to work on ensuring long-term federal funding for the territories, according to a Democratic committee spokesperson, who called the increased cap “good news.”
- **Get back to the deal: Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers** (R-Wash.) — the ranking member on that panel — wants to turn back to a bipartisan Medicaid deal the committee advanced over the summer, according to a spokesperson, citing the “uncertainty and confusion” created by CMS' new interpretation.

Agency alert

How a shutdown would affect the federal health department

Roughly 43 percent of the Department of Health and Human Services would be furloughed if Congress lets the government funding expire, an administration official told our colleague Yasmeen Abutaleb.

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Speaker Nancy Pelosi sought to quell intraparty fighting in a roughly 90-minute meeting with the Democratic caucus last night. Centrists have demanded a vote on a \$1 trillion bipartisan infrastructure bill, but more-liberal Democrats are threatening to oppose the measure to secure a vote on Biden's massive social spending bill, which includes major health care expansions, The Post's Tony Romm and Marianna Sotomayor report.

What happened:

- **Pelosi backed off** an attempt to vote this week on Biden's massive economic package, citing the fact that lawmakers are still negotiating its parameters.
- **She also warned** that the package is likely to be smaller than the \$3.5 trillion price tag sought by some Democrats.

Our take: Any cuts to the topline number mean more fights over what Democratic health priorities get trimmed down.

Coronavirus

Biden gets Pfizer booster shot on camera

Biden, who is 78, got his third shot Monday in front of live cameras. The immunization of comes after the CDC recommended people 65 years and older receive a third dose, The Post's Annie Linskey reports. Senate Minority Leader **Mitch McConnell** (R-Ky.), 79, announced he received a booster shot, and first lady **Jill Biden**, 70, is expected to receive one soon.

And Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla announced this today:

New U.S. travel restrictions bar travelers with Russia's Sputnik V shot

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- **The owner of a Puerto Rico pharmacy owner pleaded guilty to a federal charge** involving the vaccinations of minors under 12 years old (whom the coronavirus shot has not yet been authorized), according to a statement from the Justice Department.
- **Tens of thousands of health-care workers in New York** have likely failed to comply with the state's vaccine mandate —a sneak peek into the resistance the Biden administration's vaccine requirements will face, The Post's Eli Rosenberg reports

White House moves

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As for the coronavirus response:

- **Henry Walke**, a veteran official who has led the CDC's coronavirus pandemic response, is stepping aside. He will be replaced by **Barbara Mahon**, the deputy chief of the CDC's enteric-disease branch, **Politico's** Erin Banco and Sarah Oweremohle report.
- **Peter Marks**, director of the Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research, will now lead the Food and Drug Administration's vaccine office. **Marion Gruber**, director of the vaccine office, and her deputy, **Phil Krause**, announced their resignations last month, which people familiar with the situation say was partly tied to their disapproval of the White House's broad push for booster shots, The Post's Laurie McGinley reports.

Chart check

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